

Chris Mensalvas Oral History
Labor Archives of Washington
University of Washington Libraries Special Collections

CHRIS MENSALVAS
PRESIDENT, ILWU LOCAL 37

NARRATOR: CHRIS MENSALVAS

INTERVIEWERS: JOSEPH BUTTERWORTH, MARY GIBSON

SUBJECTS: CARLOS BULOSAN; ILWU LOCAL 37; CANNERY WORKERS; AGRICULTURAL WORKERS; FOOD, TOBACCO, AGRICULTURAL, AND ALLIED WORKERS; STRIKES; *THE LAUGHTER OF MY FATHER*; *AMERICA IS IN THE HEART*; POETRY

LOCATION: SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

DATE: 1959

INTERVIEW LENGTH: 01:04:00

FILE NAME: MensalvasChris_Oral History_0581-013_Track02.mp3

The Labor Archives of Washington is committed to preserving the voices and stories of individuals who have contributed to the labor movement's rich history. The LAW presents oral history interviews as part of its contribution to helping curate and create access to a broad and inclusive historical record. These interviews contain the personal recollections and opinions of the individuals involved and, therefore, may contain language, ideas or stereotypes that are offensive or harmful to others.

Individual oral histories cannot serve as the sole source of historical information about an institution or event. These narratives do not represent the views of the Labor Archives of Washington, Libraries Special Collections, or the University of Washington, past or present.

[00:00:02] MARY GIBSON: ...California, Washington, and Oregon, in hotels and restaurants in California. He learned to read from children's books at the Los Angeles Public Library during the times when he was out of work. Mr. Chris Mensalvas, president of Local 37, ILWU [International Longshore and Warehouse Union], who was with Carlos Bulosan in the early union struggle, is going to tell us some of his experiences with him this evening. Dr. Joseph Butterworth will ask the questions.

[00:00:33] JOSEPH BUTTERWORTH: When did you come to the United States, Chris?

[00:00:39] CHRIS MENSALVAS: I came to the United States way back in the year 1927.

[00:00:47] JOSEPH: Why did you come?

[00:00:51] CHRIS: Well primarily, it was my original purpose to finish my schooling here in the United States. But it so happened that I came here during the height of the Depression, you might say that work was hard to find. And it was impossible at the time for a self-supporting student to go through college. So I was forced to work in the farms myself, and also in the canneries, of course.

[00:01:31] JOSEPH: When did you first meet Carlos?

[00:01:35] CHRIS: I first met Carlos about 1932 or thirty-three, I believe, and that was in Los Angeles, California. That was the time when Carlos came from the small town of Lompoc, California, and decided to come to the city, I believe, the big city like Los Angeles.

[00:02:09] JOSEPH: Do you happen to know when he came? He was born in the Philippines, I take it.

[00:02:14] CHRIS: Yes, he was born in the Philippines.

[00:02:16] JOSEPH: And do you know when he came to his country in the first place?

[00:02:21] CHRIS: Well, on my initial recollection, Joe, I think he came to the United States about 1931.

[00:02:29] JOSEPH: About 1931. And would you say that he came for the same reason that you came, or did he have any special reason for coming?

[00:02:43] CHRIS: Well, I think the main reason why Carlos came to the America is just like most of the young men from the Philippines at the time, they came here to look for jobs. Things were hard in the Philippines about the same time that a worldwide depression was developing. And I think that was the main reason why he came over to the United States.

[00:03:21] JOSEPH: Where did he first land in the United States?

[00:03:25] CHRIS: Well, if I remember correctly, from what I—from what Carlos told me later, I think he first landed in Seattle, wasn't it?

[00:03:38] JOSEPH: And did he stay around Seattle long, or did he go down to California?

[00:03:44] CHRIS: Well, I think he stayed here a while. And then from what I learned again, a letter, I think he went to Yakima, around picking fruits and apples and all sort of working fields, and finally wound up in that small town in California, in Lompoc.

[00:04:19] JOSEPH: What kind of work did he do in California? Was it the same kind of work?

[00:04:54] CHRIS: [pauses for audio difficulties] Well, Joe, most of the time, of course, when Carlos came to Los Angeles, he was unemployed since there was no work to be had. So the only logical thing for him to do then was to come and live with us. I had a brother, his name was Julio, and also the brother of Carlos, Aurelio [Bulosan]. We were all unemployed most of the time, and sometimes one of us would get a job, which is how we got along. I lived in a two-bedroom apartment, and we had a kitchen. So Carlos lived with us for the next

three years in this manner. And of course, since that time, Carlos started to spend most of his time in the Los Angeles Public Library.

[00:06:24] JOSEPH: How long did you live that way with Carlos and his brother?

[00:06:30] CHRIS: Well, I had said, all about three years.

[00:06:33] JOSEPH: In Los Angeles?

[00:06:34] CHRIS: In Los Angeles.

[00:06:35] JOSEPH: And did you maintain contact with him after you left Los Angeles?

[00:06:46] CHRIS: Yes, I left Los Angeles first about 1933. I started to spend my time in the agricultural fields then, around the Imperial Valley. And I had been writing Carlos, and since that time, of course, I think in about 1934, he was taken to the hospital because of his TB [tuberculosis]. That was in the Los Angeles General Hospital.

[00:07:34] MARY: When you left with Carlos during those three years, how much rent did you pay for that apartment?

[00:07:42] CHRIS: Oh, I think somewhere around seven or ten dollars a week, Mary.

[00:07:53] MARY: Less than forty dollars a month, then. How many men lived in this apartment at one time?

[00:08:00] CHRIS: There were four of us.

[00:08:02] MARY: And one of you or two of you would be working. How much did you make?

[00:08:08] CHRIS: Well, the most at that time was fifteen dollars a week.

[00:08:13] MARY: So that you had about five dollars a week to feed all four of you. What sort of food did you eat?

[00:08:21] CHRIS: Well, of course, prices were not so high then at the time, so most of the time we go to the public market, where you could buy cheaper food. And we do our own cooking in that little apartment of ours there.

[00:08:53] MARY: What sort of cooking did you do? Did you cook the way that you had cooked in the Philippines, or did you adopt the kind of cooking that we do here more?

[00:09:05] CHRIS: Mary, we of course do our own cooking of familiar Filipino food. And as a matter of fact, Carlos was a very good cook. He does mostly cooking when he's around.

[00:09:23] JOSEPH: Do you remember some of his favorite dishes?

[00:09:25] CHRIS: Well, he had a favorite dish, what we call adobo. That's a pork [?braise?], and it's a very delicious food.

[00:09:43] MARY: How do you make it?

[00:09:45] CHRIS: Well, Mary, it's one of those, you might say, very rich food, because we cook it with a little vinegar and a lot of spices.

[00:10:10] JOSEPH: Well, how long was Carlos in the hospital at that time in Los Angeles?

[00:10:18] CHRIS: I think he stayed there for the first time, Joe, about eight months.

[00:10:24] JOSEPH: Eight months. And then when he came out of the hospital, did he continue to live in Los Angeles, or did he go somewhere else?

[00:10:32] CHRIS: Well, for a time he stayed there for—after he left the hospital, I was told that he lived there for at least four or five months here. Then from El Centro in Imperial Valley, I moved to the Santa Maria Valley in Central California. I found out then that Carlos was feeling better, so I asked him to come and join me there, because during those times we were involved in several agricultural workers strikes, and I felt that Carlos would be a very good help, especially in line of publicity. And also we started a little newspaper there in Santa Maria Valley, and so Carlos was made the editor of this newspaper.

[00:10:32] JOSEPH: What year was that about?

[00:10:51] CHRIS: About, I think, starting about 1936, Joe.

[00:11:42] JOSEPH: Was that the first labor dispute that either of you had been in?

[00:12:00] CHRIS: No, I was first in a strike somewhere around in Brea Valley, about 1934 and late 1933. But I think in 1936, I think that was the first time that Carlos was engaged in this union struggle.

[00:12:26] JOSEPH: I see. Did you win the strike, or did you win certain things?

[00:12:30] CHRIS: Well, I won't say we won the strike, but we got wins, increases, anyway, for the men. Of course, the union was not recognized then.

[00:12:41] JOSEPH: No.

[00:12:43] MARY: What sort of things did the paper have in it? What sort of news?

[00:12:48] CHRIS: Oh, this newspaper?

[00:12:50] MARY: Yes.

[00:12:51] CHRIS: Well, mostly labor news. You might want to know the name, Mary. We had this meeting at the Philippine Commonwealth Times, and that was published in Pismo Beach, California.

[00:13:14] JOSEPH: And how long did the paper operate?

[00:13:14] CHRIS: Oh, it operated for—we had been running it for, might say, until about 1939. And about 1939, of course, I moved to Portland, Oregon. And Carlos stayed a while in California for some time, until the Second World War that started in 1941.

[00:13:54] JOSEPH: When did the two of you meet again?

[00:13:58] CHRIS: Well, that was about—when I was in Portland, Oregon, about 1939, Carlos went back to Los Angeles and stayed there about 1942. Of course, Carlos then, I learned that he was hired briefly by the Philippine government and stayed some time in Washington, D.C., helping the government in exile from the Philippines.

[00:14:42] MARY: When did he first publish? Was that after he had worked on the Commonwealth Times paper?

[00:14:51] CHRIS: Yeah, after that. After that, yeah.

[00:14:55] MARY: You weren't near him when he first began to publish and get some publicity?

[00:15:01] CHRIS: Well, he made several trips here to Seattle. And also in Portland, of course, he came to see me. And he was going back and forth all over the country. I don't know.

[00:15:16] MARY: It must have been before this time, then, that you did a lot of the early labor organizing. I understand that the first officers of Local 37 were assassinated. Were you ever involved in any of that really rough stuff in the early days?

[00:15:35] CHRIS: Well, I had some connections with the union here in Seattle as a member of the International Executive Board of the former international union. We called it the FTA, the Food, Tobacco and Agricultural Workers Union. But I was mainly assigned in California about the time when this dealing here, the president and [?secretary treasurer?] of the union took place.

[00:16:28] JOSEPH: And now what was the name of Local 37 when you first came to Seattle?

[00:16:39] CHRIS: Well, the first name, Joe, was the quite long initials. We call it the UCAPAWA, the United Cannery, Agricultural and Packing Workers Union. Then it was finally changed to FTA, or Food, Tobacco and Agricultural Workers Union. But that was the same international union that this Local 37 now was affiliated with.

[00:17:12] MARY: How did you get people to join the union?

[00:17:16] CHRIS: Well, it just came automatically, Mary, because of course we were busy organizing agricultural workers in California under the same international here. It was easier for them to—for the organized church to organize the cannery workers, and due to the fact that there was a strong maritime labor movement here already, to call it the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, with the longshoremen, of course, as they spread here on the West Coast.

[00:18:07] MARY: Well, the conditions were bad enough so that people really wanted to join the union, then. It wasn't hard to get them to join?

[00:18:16] CHRIS: Well, I'll tell you here in Seattle, from what I remember, there was a big jurisdictional fight between the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] then, which was new in the labor movement, and with the American Federation of Labor. However, after an election conducted by the NLRB [National Labor

Relations Board], the CIO forces won. That was the beginning of this Cannery Workers' Union here involving Alaska cannery workers.

[00:18:57] JOSEPH: Well, when did you come to Seattle and start to become involved in the Cannery Workers' Union here?

[00:19:16] CHRIS: Well, I had been going to the canneries, of course, Joe, since 1939. And of course, there was a unified labor movement here by the CIO, which we were affiliated. But then came Taft-Hartley law in 1947, so that I was asked by the international to come to Seattle and was appointed personally as the publicity director of the union, because that time the AFL, again, started to raid the CIO. And we had a series of—oh, and [?elaborately?] conducted elections, until we finally won a union separate election in 1950.

[00:20:26] JOSEPH: When did the cannery workers become affiliated with the longshoremen's union, the ILWU?

[00:20:35] CHRIS: Well, that was in 1950, a big [?fact?], though. Of course, since 1949, we were conducting negotiations with them already, because the former FTA was being raided all over the country. So that we thought that by leading with the ILWU we would be in a greater position to fight our [?a part of it?].

[00:21:15] JOSEPH: That's the end. The union still exists as Local 37 of the ILWU.

[00:21:24] CHRIS: That's right, ILWU.

[00:21:25] JOSEPH: When did Carlos come to Seattle during that period?

[00:21:32] CHRIS: Well, of course, I was the president of the union since 1949. And I got a letter from Carlos that he wanted very much to come to Seattle, Washington, because of his failing health. So I discussed the matter with the Executive Board to see if we could possibly hire Carlos to be our publishing director, and I was very happy that the Executive Board and the membership approved it. At least I thought that would give Carlos, in terms of being held workers, close to the union. And he had served in that capacity as publicity director for one whole year.

[00:22:31] JOSEPH: That would be about 1953?

[00:22:34] CHRIS: About 1952, fifty-three, I think. I think that was.

[00:22:38] JOSEPH: 1953, I see. And he held that position for one year?

[00:22:46] CHRIS: As a matter of fact, over a year.

[00:22:48] JOSEPH: More than a year. Did he hold other positions within the union?

[00:22:53] CHRIS: Well, he had served in various capacities, even with the defense committee, when the Walter-McCarran Act went into effect, where most of our leaders in the local were arrested for deportation back to the Philippines.

[00:23:17] JOSEPH: Was he arrested for that purpose, or was he threatened with arrest?

[00:23:23] CHRIS: Well, he served voluntarily, of course, without pay, and continued to support the union in many ways.

[00:23:23] JOSEPH: Yes, but he was never arrested for deportation?

[00:23:39] CHRIS: No, Carlos was not.

[00:23:40] JOSEPH: And never threatened with that?

[00:23:47] CHRIS: Not to my knowledge. I don't think so, Joe. Of course, I don't know if he was questioned officially by the immigration authority.

[00:23:49] JOSEPH: And what would you say was the nature of his contribution to the union, in his various capacities?

[00:24:08] CHRIS: Oh, it's very considerable, Joe. Because even if he was not always being paid as the publicity director, he comes to the office most of the time. And of course, he does most of his writing there, typing, and also helped the union in many ways.

[00:24:47] JOSEPH: Did you have any—did he assist materially in organizing the Seattle union, or was it pretty well-organized by the time he got here?

[00:25:00] CHRIS: Well, of course by 1950 it was already unified. We had a union shop.

[00:25:11] JOSEPH: I see. Did you have any particular trouble with the employers during those years?

[00:25:19] CHRIS: Yes, you might say we hit the bricks in 1950, because we were being raided by the AF of L, and only way we could be in recognition was to form a big line. But then we were under the ILWU.

[00:25:41] JOSEPH: I see. Was that before Carlos came to Seattle, or was it to some extent during the time he was here?

[00:25:50] CHRIS: Well, that was—might say before, of course. But Carlos used to make trips back and forth from Seattle to California.

[00:26:00] JOSEPH: I see. So he was very well-known to the union, say, from the late forties on.

[00:26:12] CHRIS: And I might add, though, that most of our members came from California, Oregon. And of course, Carlos is very well-known from there, so that it would not be hard for anybody to know him while he was in Seattle.

[00:26:42] JOSEPH: What were some of the problems involved in getting out the newspaper for the union?

[00:26:51] CHRIS: Well, firstly, Joe, we used to have an official union paper, but it has become so that, of course, we have no ties to it, and putting out a paper is just very expensive matter, you see. So we discarded the paper, putting it out, about 1949. Of course, before that, it was published regularly for many years.

[00:27:31] JOSEPH: When did it start?

[00:27:32] CHRIS: Oh, I should say that we had a union paper here since 1936.

[00:27:45] JOSEPH: The paper no longer...

[00:27:46] CHRIS: No, not anymore. Of course, we usually put out union mailing.

[00:27:46] JOSEPH: Well, had Carlos been engaged in any struggles previous to that, with Seattle?

[00:28:08] CHRIS: I should say yes, Joe. I remember quite clearly. Since when Carlos got out of the hospital in Los Angeles, he came briefly to the to the Santa Maria Valley. And about this time we had the series of the strikes, both in the Santa Maria Valley and in Salinas. And there was considerable brutal activity on the part of the organized growers there. We call it vigilantes, because that's what it is, organized by the employers, used to terrorize the strikers in Salinas and all others.

[00:29:13] CHRIS: So that, about 1934, was the biggest strike there. And the union president at the time was cautioned to leave town. And the same evening that he was about to leave, the vigilantes burned a Filipino labor camp there and shot at them with rifles, and all sorts of terrorizing, and all the brutality that you would expect of vigilantes. So we had to dispatch a car in the middle of the night from Santa Maria to Salinas to pick up this official. And Carlos was with me, and we had some terrible, terrible experience speeding back to Salinas after midnight, because the vigilantes really mean business to get this president of our union. And of course the strike was broken.

[00:30:34] MARY: They didn't get him, or did they?

[00:30:36] CHRIS: No, we speeded him away from the scene.

[00:30:40] MARY: What did you do with this man, hide him someplace?

[00:30:46] CHRIS: So the union was broken in Salinas, so we moved our headquarters to Santa Maria. And since that time, we had always maintained the union labor organization among the field workers there. And of course, about 1937, the CIO was founded, came into existence, so that we immediately affiliated with the CIO.

[00:31:27] JOSEPH: Did the work as described by [John] Steinbeck in his various books, do his descriptions have any relation to the things that you went through in your union?

[00:31:54] CHRIS: Most certainly, Joe. You see, I read Steinbeck's book *Grapes of Wrath*. And as a matter of fact, Steinbeck came himself, visited and interviewed most of our people around there, because he confined himself in his book about the plight of the people coming from the Dust Bowl, you know, especially the people from Oklahoma. But he had been coming to the camps and interviewing us.

[00:32:39] JOSEPH: Did he interview you or Carlos?

[00:32:43] CHRIS: I think maybe that about this time, Carlos must have met Steinbeck.

[00:32:56] JOSEPH: You know that he was acquainted with him?

[00:32:59] CHRIS: Oh yeah, definitely, yeah.

[00:33:02] JOSEPH: Steinbeck's book, however, does not deal particularly with the plight of the Filipinos.

[00:33:09] CHRIS: No.

[00:33:11] JOSEPH: Nevertheless, there's much in common between—

[00:33:15] CHRIS: Oh, yes.

[00:33:15] JOSEPH: —The Filipinos and what he describes.

[00:33:19] CHRIS: As a matter of fact, it used to be that as a part of the employers' tactics, that they split the different nationality groups, whites and Mexicans and Filipinos. They have separate unions, because at that time, the AF of L had refused to accept membership of so-called "minorities," you see. So we were forced to maintain an independent union.

[00:34:04] JOSEPH: Does that condition still hold?

[00:34:07] CHRIS: Not now, not now, because at the organized level, the present time has recognized the necessity of getting into membership all the different national groups.

[00:34:23] JOSEPH: I see. So that they—it's possible for people of all races to belong to Local 37?

[00:34:40] CHRIS: Yeah, yes.

[00:34:41] JOSEPH: And would you say that they do?

[00:34:45] CHRIS: Yeah, they sure do now, especially when the CIO came into existence.

[00:34:52] JOSEPH: Well, I was thinking that it was time to go on to Carlos' literary work, unless you had a question, Mary, on what we've...Well, was there any subsequent strike in which Carlos was active?

[00:35:12] CHRIS: Yes, Joe. I remember about the asparagus workers strike conducted by the FTA, Food, Tobacco and Agricultural Workers in Stockton, California. It was about 1948 and forty-nine. As a matter of fact, the strike there was very solid, that the growers were forced—of course, they didn't want to recognize our union, so they would rather lick their crops right in the field, because nobody's going to cut their asparagus. And so, of course, they didn't want to recognize our union, so that the following year, 1949, we continued this strike again. And Carlos was very, very active in it, of course, as a voluntary worker. And most of the officers from Local 37 here in Seattle were simply stuck, and including myself.

[00:36:46] JOSEPH: And do you remember any particular incidents that occurred to Carlos?

[00:36:53] CHRIS: Well, Carlos served as our publicity man. And I must also state that because of the activity of our union, wages were raised the following year, and also that—

[00:37:21] JOSEPH: They were what?

[00:37:23] CHRIS: Wages were raised the following year, 1949. Because we started, we continued our picketing, and the same thing happened, like in 1948. The growers just lost their crops. And I must also point out that the asparagus workers there are and remain our own members in Local 37 going to the canneries in Alaska. And because of our activities, the growers were forced to improve their housing camps, because we

contacted the state housing authority in Sacramento, and they have a certain standards that these growers have to follow. And the following year we were surprised that most of these growers put up new houses, from our pressure, of course.

[00:38:32] MARY: New housing for the workers?

[00:38:34] CHRIS: Bigger housing units.

[00:38:36] MARY: What were the conditions before the strike? How much were the workers paid? How long did they work? Where did they live? Was there sanitation, and were there cooking facilities?

[00:38:48] CHRIS: Well before the strike, of course, Mary, conditions were very bad, because in asparagus, the workers are paid not by the hour, it's a contract job by piecewise. And it's a hard, back-breaking job, cutting asparagus, stooping down all day, and you have to move so fast to harvest asparagus.

[00:39:34] MARY: Did families live out on those farms, too, or were there groups of people in barrack-type buildings, or did they live in tents?

[00:39:41] CHRIS: Oh, they lived in barrack-type buildings. And of course, they also had wives, the wives usually lived in town, because the camps are, well, primarily for men.

[00:40:03] MARY: Are they like army barracks, or were they worse than that?

[00:40:08] CHRIS: Well, most places they are worse.

[00:40:15] MARY: Did you do your own cooking when you were working in the camp?

[00:40:19] CHRIS: Well, what they told me is the men grew group together, and they elect the cooks, just like, you might say, elected [inaudible] _____.

[00:40:37] MARY: Oh, you hired someone, then, to do the cooking from among yourselves?

[00:40:41] CHRIS: Yeah, that's right.

[00:40:42] JOSEPH: And you'd say that conditions were improved as the result of the union activity.

[00:40:54] CHRIS: That's most certainly, Joe.

[00:40:57] JOSEPH: Was the improvement maintained or even continued?

[00:41:06] CHRIS: Lately, I found out—I make trips at least once a year to Stockton to visit our members. And I'm glad to report that even if the union is not recognized in that part of the country, the employers recognize that the workers are united, and that if conditions do not improve, then they expect some trouble.

[00:41:45] JOSEPH: So you tell that conditions on the whole are now much better.

[00:41:50] CHRIS: Much better

[00:41:52] JOSEPH: There's been a good deal of talk about the Mexican workers in California and other places. Did you run into them at all? Did you and Carlos run into...

[00:42:11] CHRIS: Oh, I would say, Joe, that for instance, that particular strike in 1948, forty-nine, there was a great number of Mexican workers, and they regularly joined with us, and also very active in the picket lines. And I understand now, I think just a few months ago, the AFL-CIO has started to really get the job started in organizing all the agricultural workers, regardless of nationality. And I think with the support of the AFL-CIO, and they expect also the support of the Teamsters, because the Teamsters are the key in organizing agricultural workers, the truck drivers.

[00:43:28] JOSEPH: And that includes the Mexican Americans?

[00:43:32] CHRIS: That includes everybody. They have an organizing committee there now, and even some ministers, and even Catholic priests are pitching in.

[00:43:49] JOSEPH: Well, do you have any further questions, Mary, on these points? I thought we'd go into Carlos' literary activity, perhaps.

[00:44:00] MARY: Well, just one question. We understand that there won't be so many people going to Alaska as there used to be, partly because Alaska's now a state. So that means that these people who went to Alaska in the summertime and did agricultural work in the spring and in the fall will probably be doing agricultural work all the time. Do you have anything to say about that?

[00:44:29] CHRIS: Well, of course this year, my read on the 1959 season in Alaska is very bad, primarily due to the depletion of the fish. There's just not enough fish. And it's not the reason that Alaska is now a state, but there is just not enough fish. So that we anticipate that most of our members who work in the farms will have to reconcile themselves to do the same job in the farms, because we don't expect an improvement in the fish the next two or three years.

[00:45:35] JOSEPH: When did Carlos begin to write?

[00:45:39] CHRIS: Well, as far as I could remember, Joe, I think he started to write almost immediately when he arrived here in this country.

[00:45:53] MARY: How old was he, then?

[00:45:58] CHRIS: Well, he must be between nineteen.

[00:46:05] MARY: Oh, he was young, then. Quite young.

[00:46:13] CHRIS: And the first time, of course, that I knew he had published a work was when I met him in Los Angeles, because he had to take with him, I think, entitled, I believe, Anthology of California Poets. And I remember quite clearly one of his poetry was published in that book.

[00:46:56] JOSEPH: I see then, you'd say that he wrote regular poetry?

[00:46:59] CHRIS: Yes.

[00:46:59] JOSEPH: Okay. When and how did *The Laughter of my Father* come about?

[00:47:09] CHRIS: Well, from what I remember, he was showing me some of the—I didn't know—the first time I knew that *The Laughter of my Father* was published is when it was already off the press. Of course, I knew that he was writing it.

[00:47:41] JOSEPH: Well, did he write that serially, that is, in sections, and then send them off to magazines?

[00:47:51] CHRIS: I think he wrote it serially, I think, the order.

[00:47:58] JOSEPH: And where were some of them published?

[00:48:05] CHRIS: That, I don't really know. I only read parts of it when he was giving it to me.

[00:48:13] JOSEPH: Were some of them printed in The New Yorker?

[00:48:16] CHRIS: I think so.

[00:48:19] JOSEPH: The New Yorker?

[00:48:21] CHRIS: Because he had been writing short stories, too, at the same time for Philippine newspapers and magazines long before *The Laughter of my Father* was published.

[00:48:36] JOSEPH: And The New Yorker published some of these things, outside *The Laughter of my Father*?

[00:48:48] CHRIS: Yeah.

[00:48:51] JOSEPH: Well, what year would you say *The Laughter of my Father* was published?

[00:48:59] CHRIS: Well, I would say, Joe, that I think it was published about 1941 or forty-two.

[00:49:11] JOSEPH: And when was *America is in the Heart* published?

[00:49:17] CHRIS: I think that was published, Joe, about 1943.

[00:49:20] JOSEPH: And there was a subsequent re-edition of it, *The Laughter of my Father*, in paperback.

[00:49:29] CHRIS: Yeah.

[00:49:29] JOSEPH: And could you say what it was specifically Carlos had in mind when he wrote *America is in the Heart*?

[00:49:50] CHRIS: Well, of course, as you know, Joe, *America is in the Heart* is an autobiography. And it's more or less a personal history, a personal story based on the experiences of the average Filipino immigrant in the country.

[00:50:23] MARY: When Carlos began to publish, how did his life change? Did you still see quite a bit of him, and did he still have some union activity, or was his time taken up mostly with literary work?

[00:50:26] CHRIS: Well, I know Carlos got his inspiration by going places and mixing with the workers. But I noticed and I learned from my own observations that he goes to the library quite often. But somehow, in my opinion, in my judgment of him, he wanted to go to the country in farms and mix with workers, stay there maybe for two or three months, then go back to the city and write.

[00:51:29] MARY: In other words, what he wrote was always based on life. It wasn't romanticism at all.

[00:51:37] CHRIS: Well, I would say that it's based on experience, by working with the workers and being with them, by living with them. And I think that's where he gets his inspiration.

[00:51:56] MARY: When I first met Carlos, I remember him telling me that he was a member of a group of writers of whom others were Carl Sandburg and William Saroyan, and I forget who else, and that they treated him like a younger brother.

[00:52:16] CHRIS: Well, I remember that Carlos, while in Los Angeles happened to know that—I think he used to belong to the League of American Writers, but I don't know if it's the League's systems. But he used to see very much of old [inaudible] _____ writers like William Saroyan and possibly Steinbeck. And of course he, being a young man, maybe that's what you mean by treating him as a younger brother or something.

[00:53:03] MARY: He said they were very kind to him. I remember I had the feeling that they were probably established writers, and he, as a beginner, was accepted by them and helped by them. What sort of life did he live during this period of when he was writing? He still saw quite a bit of his old friends?

[00:53:26] CHRIS: Well, Carlos, of course, when he was in LA and I wasn't there anymore, then I guess I went down to visit him once in a while. That was during—before the war, I suppose, about 1937, thirty-eight, thirty-nine. And he did most of this writing in the apartment where he was staying with his brother Aurelio, mainly writing in the kitchen.

[00:54:07] MARY: I know that he wrote a lot of poems for his friends. He wrote some poems to me, and I didn't even know him for a very long period of time. And that he wrote poems to Jean Gundlach, through whom I met him. I met him in about fifty. I'd gone over to see Jean with a friend, and I was complaining bitterly about some friend who had to have all his teeth out at about the age of twenty-eight. Jean told me that this person hadn't really suffered at all, but I should meet some people who had really had a rough time. So we had been sitting around drinking rum and Coca-Cola at her house. About 10:30, we all jumped in the car and went off to the apartment where Ponce Torres, who was another union associate of Carlos, was living. We got there, we went up to the second floor of an old gray house below Marine Hospital, and in the apartment were Chris Mensalvas, Carlos Bulosan, the [?Kabibi?] brothers, Marjorie—what was her last name? A friend of Carlos, at any rate. This was the first time I had met any of these people, and I was very, very impressed, I remember. Carlos was wearing something, a dark suit. He was all dressed up when he was introduced to me. He bowed and kissed my hand. Then after that, we got to be friends later when he was in the hospital, and he wrote me letters. I know that he wrote poems to all of his friends. That was the thing that he did for them. He'd go someplace with him, and he'd write a poem about it afterwards.

[00:55:58] CHRIS: Well, that's correct, because Carlos loved to do that, writing poetry. Even if a lot of people in the room are having fun, he still could write poetry.

[00:56:16] JOSEPH: Did he manage to do writing a lot on occasions when he was in the sanitarium?

[00:56:25] CHRIS: Yes, I think, especially when he was in L.A., Joe, the general hospital.

[00:56:36] JOSEPH: Would that be true when he was in Seattle?

[00:56:40] CHRIS: Yeah, last four years. That's right.

[00:56:43] JOSEPH: What did he write during those last two or three years, more short stories or poetry?

[00:56:50] CHRIS: I think short stories more than more than poetry.

[00:56:53] JOSEPH: Did Carlos have any scholarships or grants or anything like that?

[00:57:13] CHRIS: I remember, Joe, just before he died of pneumonia, he came to see me in the union office and showed me a check from the Carnegie Institute and explained to me that it was a grant for him to finish a book, some sort of the continuation of *America is in the Heart*.

[00:57:44] JOSEPH: I see. Was he working on it?

[00:57:46] CHRIS: He was working on it.

[00:57:48] JOSEPH: Is that some of the unpublished material? In other words, he never published that, did he?

[00:58:00] CHRIS: I think he was working on his continuation of *America is in the Heart*, which has never been published, of course, as the special award that the Carnegie Institute asked him to do.

[00:58:22] JOSEPH: Had he received any such grants before that time?

[00:58:27] CHRIS: Not to my knowledge, Joe. I think that's the only one. I see.

[00:58:35] JOSEPH: And when was it that Carlos died? [audio malfunction] he'd had tuberculosis for a good part of his life. Is that what he died of?

[00:58:56] CHRIS: Well, I knew he had the tuberculosis for a long time. That was why he was operated on in the Los Angeles General Hospital. And he also was confined in the Portland Sanitarium here in Seattle for some time.

[00:59:16] JOSEPH: I see. Did he die of TB or something else?

[00:59:22] CHRIS: Well, from what I learned later, I think he died of chronic pneumonia.

[00:59:29] JOSEPH: I see. Do you know whether Carlos ever saw his father and mother again?

[00:59:39] CHRIS: No, I don't think so, Joe, because he never had a chance to go back to the Philippines ever since he arrived in this country.

[00:59:47] JOSEPH: I suppose he was in constant communication with them?

[00:59:54] CHRIS: Yeah, I suppose so. Yeah, his folks.

[00:59:59] JOSEPH: I understand, Chris, that you're going back to the Philippines in a short while.

[01:00:15] CHRIS: Well, that's correct, Joe. A short while, we will be visiting the Philippines.

[01:00:26] JOSEPH: Do you expect to visit Carlos' birthplace?

[01:00:31] CHRIS: I certainly will, Joe, because it so happens that his birthplace is only about seventy miles from mine.

[01:00:42] JOSEPH: I see. Well, we've come to the concluding part of the program by Mary Gibson.

[01:00:56] MARY: This committee has been trying to collect the published manuscripts as well as the unpublished manuscripts of Carlos Bulosan. We know that there are some of the originals of his published manuscripts in the city, and we have quite a few unpublished ones, which we hope to turn over to the University of the Philippines, or perhaps the University of Washington, so that they're in a safe place, accessible to scholars. To do this, we are holding meetings for fundraising, and we also have some autographed copies of poems which Mr. Bulosan wrote. It's a rather big job, because he wrote prodigiously, and there are manuscripts all over the West Coast. Many of the unpublished manuscripts are suitable for publication, and we would like anyone who has any knowledge of these or could help us in any way to communicate with the attorney for the Bulosan Manuscript Committee, John Caughlan, Second and Terry Building, Seattle, Washington. That's Bulosan Manuscript Committee, John Caughlan, Second and Terry Building, Seattle, Washington.

[01:02:20] JOSEPH: Mary, did you—some of the unpublished material consists of letters, poems, stories, many of which the existence of which the Committee may not know about.

[01:02:40] MARY: That is true. We have manuscripts which were given to us by Carlos, or which were—some of which he had given to me for retyping for possible publication. A great many friends of his had poems which he wrote for them, like other people would write letters. He wrote letters to a great many people. And at the time of the funeral, I found a poem written on the back of a Local 37 office paper, which he had apparently just scribbled off when he was in the office.

[01:03:21] JOSEPH: And the Committee is also, as I understand it, interested in original manuscripts of work that had been published by Carlos.

[01:03:32] MARY: That is correct, because some of those manuscripts would be of great literary value, both now and probably even more at a future date. I believe that Mrs. Bob Patrick, Jo Patrick, has the original of *The Laughter of My Father*, for instance, of which she will be turning over to a university library. Any of these manuscripts...